EFFECT OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN TOWARDS THE REVIVING OF IGBO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This work investigates the effect of visual communication Design towards the revving of Igbo Language. The study attempts to address the Igbo language extinction through the use of visual communication design approach. The purpose of the study is to revive Igbo language through the use of suitable illustration technique that will enhance the understanding and improve retention of Igbo language and its works. To the work Paul Ricoeurs theory of interpretation was used to situate the work properly. This study examines case studies, theoretical and practical applications to demonstrate how visual communication design can bridge linguistic barriers, foster

cultural pride and facilitate the intergenerational transmission of Igbo language. This was done through the use of digital illustration technique, Corel draw and photo-shop. This study adopted a descriptive survey design and other techniques inherent in Fine and Applied arts research method. Ultimately this abstract underscore the potential of visual communication design as a powerful tool in the revitalization efforts of endangered languages like Igbos. Conclusions were drawn and recommendations proffered for artists to be used in book illustration, and let there be proper synergy between the artist, the authors and the Government and Government should make illustrations compulsory for all Igbo books used in kindergarten and primary schools as obtainable is schools in developed countries.

Key words; Visual arts, Visual Communication CorelDraw, Igbo, Language, Illustration

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Introduction

The world today is saturated with images, visual technologies and mostly visual practice. A wide range of production and distribution technologies circulate a variety of visuals in the form of photographs, video, unique illustrations, representations, animations and diverse media through blogs, online photo albums, YouTube, Myspace among others. Still images stare out across the communicational landscape and moving images try to grab attention through a multiplicity of devices, enabling people to easily share information in the 21st century.

Design is made based on beauty and function. Most designs that compete with other visual stimuli (a poster in the streets, illustrations in books, and ad in magazines, a sign on the road) must both attract and retain attention as designs are almost around us and used as a survival skill that people tend to take for granted. It is a vital and useful tool for navigating the world. It is all about a clear and concise way of visually communicating information.

Everyday life in the 21st century has shown that people use more visuals than ever before. Research suggest that the balance between words and visuals has shifted considerably for new forms of literacy (Brumberger, 2011). Visual communication informs, instructs and change our ideas about things and people highly opined society. The environment created by people is a projection of the same people, a sort of self-portrait that include dimensions. Communication on the other hand entails both imageries and languages and most a times, English language as a dominant language across the globe is mostly used but does not permeate into the fabrics of the society where illiteracy is most prevalent. Communication is a language, and it goes beyond oral. This goes to show the importance of language in communication generally which also includes visual communication. Languages therefore involve oral, signs and illustrations and are employed for effective passage of message either spoken, through gesticulation or graphic representations.

Language as a means of communication is also seen as a vital instrument for the preservation of the culture of a certain group of people and its role towards building the morals of the youth has been a thing of discourse in recent times. It has been proved as a vehicle by which the culture of a people is transmitted and preserved. In recent years the issue of language and cultural endangered has been in focus by the United Nations especially as it relates to Igbo language (see: UNESCO 2008).

The Igbo and their Language

Igbo people live chiefly in Southern Nigeria. They speak Igbo as a language of the Benue –Congo branch of the Nigeria Congo language family and are very rich in their cultural, religious and sociopolitical inclinations.

Today *Ndigbo* which is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria is faced with the enormous task of reviving, revitalizing and sustaining their language as a tool towards improving and preserving their culture and pride. *Ndigbo* who are sometimes erroneously referred to as Ibo is one of the prominent ethnic groups found in Nigeria within West Africa and numbering in tens of millions. They are directly indigenous to the East and West of the lower Niger River, with a very significant population found on the eastern side of the river. They speak Igbo as their language which includes various dialects. According to Nwala (1985:15) "*Ndi Igbo* form one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. Their territory cuts across the equatorial forest in the south and the savanna in the north. This territory of the Igbo includes areas both east and west of the River Niger. In the west, it includes Aboh, Asaba and Agbor in the Delta state of Nigeria". In the East it embraces the whole of Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo, Abia, parts of Ogoja, in Cross River State of Nigeria and parts of Ahoada and Port Harcourt of Rivers State. Part of Kogi, Akpanya and part of Benue State. They are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa and seen as socially and culturally diverse, consisting of many sub- groups.

Ndigbo as one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria it is rather unfortunate that they have found themselves in a position of near identity loss and faced with identity crises. The continuous threat from globalization and modernity has remained a two- key issue in our contemporary world. The existence of technology has turned the world into a global village without boundaries and as such created opportunities for appropriation of cultures. However, in recent times the issue of globalization and modernity joining the world to a global village, and eradicating weaker cultures has raised scholarship concerns and agitations on how to prevent the extinction of weaker cultures. Amadi and Agena (2018) while acknowledging the fact that "globalization and its unfolding dynamics are taking various forms in recent decades including resurgent novel modes of behaviour and new identity." Maintain that:

> The effect of globalization on cultural diversity is a challenging debate. The advancement of technology dissolves international boundaries and open cultures to a whole new arena, enabling globalization to occur… The debate on culture mutation is a corollary revisionism which argues that globalization should be revisited as it is at odds with cultural sustainability.

Supporting Amadi and Agena (2018), Nwaezeigwe (2017) states that "No nation or people who toys with the knowledge of their past expects a future built on a strong foundation of unity, pride and sustainable development".

Reflecting on the views of Amadi and Agena (2018) and Nwezeigwe (2017) the researcher purports that cultural revival remains the solution to sustain the ailing Igbo culture, especially the language which stands as the vehicle to convey the culture, as the history of a people is like the stream of life from which the people's character, form and structure of the identity, their backwardness and progress are drawn. It affords a people the platform on which to predict their future. Thus, just as every stream has a source, so every group of people has a beginning and the course of a stream, the course of their history and the mouth of the stream, the end of an era (Nwaezeigwe, 2017:1). Therefore the people's culture is their pride and identity.

Moreover, given that culture is seen as the primary adaptive mechanism of humans and takes place much faster than human biological evolution most cultural change can be viewed as culture adopting to itself (Cropper, 2003). Investigations have arisen from belief in many different theories of culture and have often given voice to new theoretical bases for approaching the elusive term. Many early anthropologists conceived of culture as a collection of traits and studied the diffusion, or spread of these traits from one society to another. Critics of diffusion however pointed out that the theory failed to explain why certain traits spread and other do not just like the case of the subject matter among *Ndigbo*

Igbo is a language spoken as a mother tongue in seven states and fifty local government areas in Nigeria (source?). Within Igbo land, there has been massive movement of people from the autonomous rural communities into the cosmopolitan urban centres. Today, it is recognized that Igbo language and culture is in crisis (Ukwu 2009). He (who is he?) went further to say that from all indications not enough is being done to preserve, develop and promote them. At the international level the language has been systematically downgraded as a subject for study or a medium of global information. In Nigeria, the number and range of Igbo programmes in tertiary institutions have declined. At secondary School level, Igbo as a core subject is neglected. Most tragically, at primary school level the mother tongue policy has long been abandoned and there is very little in the school curriculum to teach the children. Considering all these developments the study found it necessary that a lot need to be done towards reviving Igbo language and culture through visual communication design approaching this via introduction of the modern illustration techniques.

Concept of Visual Art / Visual communication

The past and present centuries have been awash with artistic productions and cultural practices that speak towards political life whether dynamic or static. Arts and culture have played a big influence and role in influencing society positively, art and artists of the society in some areas of social life. The arts and culture are seen to represent the ideals, norms, and standard acceptable group behaviour with which people identify with and are obliged to comply for the sake of social harmony and co-habitation. Art does not only show people what to do yet engaging with good art work can connect you to your senses, body and mind. It can make the people concerned return to their senses and have a re-think and this re-think may spur thinking engagement and action.

Nader and Moosa (2012) described art as one important means to develop creativity and establishment of inner innovative forces it reinforced appropriately many mental problems of human beings could be resolved. It shows that art has been proven capable of solving some problems mental, social, psychological and even medical. Most of us know what it means and how it touches when we access work of art, whether it is a song, a play, a poem, a novel, a painting or graphic works when we are touched, we are moved, we are transported to a near place that is nevertheless strongly rooted in a physical experience. We become aware of a feeling that may not be unfamiliar to us but which we did not focus on before. This transformative experience is what art is constantly seeking.

Joy & Skinner (2005) in their analysis of the power of art and its function asserted that,

> I know that arts and culture make contributions to health, to education and crime reduction, to strengthen communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being, but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it, but all I know is that their contributions to the society are unquantifiable and immeasurable.

When adults are asked to think of what to do or something they love to do- something they pursue in spare pockets of time –virtually everyone will identify an activity connected with the arts, the body or the natural world (Upitis 1990, 2010). The meaning and relevance of art in all human endeavors can never be overestimated. The connection between, making and learning have been espoused for centuries that is why in the definition of one renowned psychologist Dewey (1906, 1977,) he asserted that to feel the meaning of what one is doing, and rejoice in it, is to unite in one's inner realization of life and facts that is unfolding of the inner life and the ordered development of material conditions- that is art. Art has performed a great deal in redirecting and redefining human behavioural patterns. It has brought a lot of changes and created new approach towards understanding and tackling issues. In terms of changing ones behavioral pattern

Moore (2010) supported this when he said:

> Throughout history people have used art to influence the beliefs and behavior of others, from the earliest times the leaders among us have known that good picture, song, sculpture, prints or building can get our attention and maybe change our minds. Art has been used to educate us, of the existence of many gods. We have cheerfully marched away to kill people who not long before had not been our enemies and true to fashion, have adopted attitudes and styles which were incomprehensible to our parents. We have been persuaded to brush our teeth regularly, to grow vegetables in time of need and, in this modern age, to consume a staggering diversity of branded goods and services

With the above assertion one will believe the efficacy of art in changing people's behavior. It is on this basis that the researcher strongly believes that using visual communication design will make a change and draw Ndigbo back to the need for the language speaking and to protect their culture from dying (use: extinction).

Visual communication is a powerful tool in terms of comprehension. A large body of research (mention some) indicates that visual ones (remove this underlined word) help us to retrieve and remember information better. The research outcomes on visual learning make complete sense when you consider that our brain is mainly an image processor (much of our sensory cortex is devoted to vision), not a word processor (Brumberger 2014), in fact the part of the brain used to process words is quiet small in comparison to the part that processes visual images. Words are abstract and rather difficult for the brain to refer, whereas visuals are concrete and as much more easily remembered. The importance of visual communication therefore is so needed in the fight to revive, revitalize and sustain our language from extinction. During this work the theory of interpretation by Ricoeur which provides an approach through which one uses hermeneutics to achieve congruence between philosophy, methodology and method. It helps in interpretation, explanations and understanding

Omenuko and Digital Visual Illustration for Revival of Igbo Language

The novel ''Omenuko'' was written in 1933 by Pita Nwanna. The novel was recorded as the first Igbo novel. The researcher observed the author's great effort in documenting literature and the promotion of Igbo tradition and culture. The researcher postulates the need to bring back the book to lime light and to promote interest in reading this novel through the introduction of illustrations, using the 21st century digital illustration technique because of absence of illustrations in the novel as this will attract and lure the interest of the young ones towards reading it. Most children of Igbo extraction find it difficult reading Igbo novels, but with adequate illustration and beautiful pictures it will help to aid understanding, reading and practice because according to Onwuekwe (2013):

> Illustration is a vital tool in projecting meaning in pictorial form and defined as pictorial material appearing with text which amplifies or enables the comprehension of text. Illustration as mentioned comes in different forms, it may be as maps, charts, diagrams, or decorative or decorative elements. They are directly more usually representation of scenes, people or objects related in some manner, directly, indirectly or symbolically, to the text they accompany. Illustration when used in novels makes the text more understandable as it concretizes the text by making it imaginable or visible through the visuals. It can equally come in different types, the pen and pencil, which is regarded as the analogue.

The researcher intends to engage in the new method called the digital illustration, which uses tools in the computer. Brower and Everett (2009) cited in Onwuekwe (2013) described digital illustration as a technique of using a computer to provide an original artwork. Illustrations done through these methods are more captivating, creative and more natural to the reader or viewer and provide more understanding to the books event and context.

The importance of visual illustration connotes the old saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words" life would have been difficult without paintings, photographs, charts, diagrams, and graphics. These are some of the reasons why showing is such an important form of communication. People think in terms of images not words. Graphic design is all about a clear and concise way of visually communicating information. The visual communication design or graphic design will be interchangeably used here as they intend to mean the same thing, it spur the designer towards thinking and solving problems through the use of visual images in such a way that it will be interpreted correctly. The illustration or imagery help guide the understanding and foster a comprehension of the story being told. Authors and illustrators utilize the interaction of the words and pictures to enhance the telling of a complex and meaningful story (O'neil 2011).

All over the world, pictures speak the same language as it is understood by all irrespective of country, class or creed. Where books are written in foreign language, illustrations explain what the readers cannot understand because of the language that expresses the book.

Basal, Celen, Kaya and Bogaz (2016) in supporting the claim affirm that, "Pictures are our first language, it offers a language we all intuitively understand…. Without illustration, presenting learning materials merely through textual information may not lead to efficient learning demanded by the excessive amount of information.

Processes of Digital Illustration Design of the Novel Omenuko Using Corel Draw and Photoshop CS6

It is important that the processes of digital illustration be executed in steps, for easy comprehension and also to exhibit the aesthetic value of digital illustration. The first step is the narration of the tale "*Omenuko"* as extracted from the book. Step two shall involve visualization process where the main character, *Omenuko* will be developed, among other sub characters. The process includes sketches, draw and paint, vector tracing bitmap painting, draw and fill with colours, use of tablet and mouse to trace.

The drawing process exposes the researcher to the creative ingenuity that underscores the belief that with computer the work of artist is in threat. The use of digital tools and equipment does not add or take away creativity from the user, for these modern trends are mere tools. Creativity is the important aspect which is to be put into consideration first, without which the user cannot be productive. To succeed on this, one must be creative and must know the rudiments, and the vocabulary of design. The sketches which illustrates each selected portions of the book *Omenuko* were displayed hereto, however, a few of them will be used for the explanation of the processes. The sketches will be discussed based on the scenes found on the sketched chapters of the book.

Stage 1, Narration of the story of *Omenuko*

As stated earlier the book *Omenuko* is the first novel written in Igbo language by Pita Nwanna and it was very popular among the *Ndi Igbo.* The novel achieved its popularity because it portrayed the life style of an Igbo man as such described as realistic novel. The narrative centers on the life of a certain man in Igbo land known as *Iguegbe Odum* (*Omenuko)* who is from Arochukwu, and migrated to Arondizuogu, in search of greener pasture. Omenuko was born into a poor family of four boys and two girls, and based on that he was given out to go and learn a trade. He started his life as an apprentice merchant who served his master Omemgboji successfully and was in return established by his master after learning the trade. He became successful and was known among the people for his wealth. Omemgboji swore to monitor Omenuko's progress and see to his success because of his obedience during his apprentice days. Therefore, due to Omenuko's success, people brought their children to learn trade under his watch.

One day Omenuko was travelling with his servants to Bende market to buy goods. When they got to Ezinnachi were Igwu River is located, while crossing the river, they fell inside with their goods. Based on the incident Omenuko sold off some of his servants to raise money for his business

again. Having committed this abomination Omenuko went home and informed two of his brothers about what happened to seek a way out. This singular act of abomination forced Omenuko and his people into exile to Mgborogwu, another town. There he was made the chief of Mgborogwu pending the time Obiefula the crown prince will grow up to assume the father's position because of his father old age. Thereafter, the chief of Mgborogwu became sick and subsequently gave up the ghost. After the death of the chief, Omenuko summoned the people of Mgborgwu to remind them of the decision of the chief, when he was alife. Omenuko carried out his leadership duties creditably well as approved by the people.

Stage 2: Visual Narrative of Omenuko

Visual narrations elaborate books in a way that are interesting and catchy to retain attention. This is done to concretize most of the things read in visual forms. Visual narrations encompasses ideas that make intangible things tangible. They project and comprehend things that ordinarily be regarded as inconsequential. The main character in the book "Omenuko" is seen as a figure that is meant to teach the life and times of *OdumIguegbe*. To the artist, *Omenuko* represents everything in the Igbo culture. *Omenuko* has been represented in the book literally as very ambitious and well-focused character. His dealings in the book tries to show the life styles of most Igbo people who achieved much in their endeavor. He portrays visually a very strong man, able bodied and healthy. The *Omenuko* story was based on the life of Igbo man and already narrated above. The man in question who is from *Arondizuogu* of Imo state and migrated to Abia for his business. In the character of Omenuko the artist tried to relate the work to the style of dressing seen and identified within this part of Igbo Land.

The researcher tries to develop a visual character that epitomizes the qualities inherent in Omenuko as explained above. Different figures were made to enable the researcher make a choice bearing in mind all the qualities stated above. The costume were equally considered so as to have a proper representation of the character in terms of culture and region.



Fig 1. Researcher's impression of Omenuko

The sketch on fig one was made to represent the character Omenuko because it meets up with the requirement inherent among the people of Imo and Abia axis were Omenuko's true-life story was situated. It was equally considered as it will create consistency when seen among the crowd. In the process of interpreting the character and the story using digital illustration process, realism and naturalism were used in the concept development. Below each illustration were messages in English that will be employed to help explain the story.

Different skills abound in creating illustrations digitally with Photoshop CS6, involving vector and bitmap graphics. In this case the researcher applied the draw and paint technique. It requires the application of digital colours direct on the drawings made on the digital layout. Some of the tools on the Photoshop CS6 to be used within this level include art brushes, selection tools, Feathering and layering properties among others.

The sub headings shows that starting from the birth of a man in the society that it marks the beginning of everything and for a child to be useful he/she must engage in something which gives him/her the occupation which paves way for usefulness in the society. In those days some were sold into slavery to help their masters and Omenuko committed an atrocity when he sold those people that were helping him in the trade into slavery that led to his exile.

Stage3, Penciling

Having built the idea of what the artist wants. The next step here is making sketch of the scene found in the selected chapters of the book *Omenuko.* The rough sketches are made on paper using 'B' series pencils. The 'B' series are most advisable as it can encourage erasing when mistakes are made. This stage is known as penciling as appears in the heading.

Some of the scenes presented in Sketch are that of *Omenuko* briefing Okoroafor and Nwabuezeon what happened to him at the "*IyiOgwe*", the scene where *Omenuko* and his people were going on exile, *Omenuko* and two of his brothers before the chief of Mgborogwu.

Fig 3*: Omenuko* at the palace of the Eze briefing him about his ordeal with two of his brothers.



Stage 4, Inking

The next procedure in digital illustration is to allow the use of ink or pen to run through the wanted line to bring out the desired outline. In the process of inking, the work done is hereby outlined with strokes of pencils. Some of the pencil lines are wanted while the others may be unwanted. It is left for the researcher to pick interesting lines from the strokes and make a clean ink drawing from there. It enables you define the drawing adequately and in the process different ball pen points are used to enhance the strokes of the lines properly to enhance creativity. The process of erasing the unwanted strokes of pencils can be done using digital method but most at times time consuming. To be fast in the inking process the researcher did the erasing manually.

Stage 5, Scanning

This stage involves scanning drawing onto Photoshop layout and arrangement of files accordingly. Also, enhancement of imagery to appear sharp on the outlines to make room for clarify colour fill. It is now turn to scan the inked drawings. In this case one can use any laser scanner or even use the photographing system. This is a situation whereby one uses good phone or camera to shoot the illustrated work. Either way, the result is usually sending onto digital interface. The researcher used the scanning method and did this at the level of 300 dpi to enable him to achieve a distinct piece. After scanning comes the elimination of dirt, dust and scratches, pencil marks and unwanted tones. To achieve a good contrast, it was scanned as black and white, after which one can convert to CMYK or RGB colour mode. The process of converting to gray is; click image > mode > gray scale. After this we convert to RGB or CYMYK mode by clicking on image > RGB > CMYK. All these abbreviations are found in the colour mode, and they mean CMYK
-Cyan Magenta, Yellow and White while RGB stands for Red Green and Blue. These are mainly the primary colours used in spectrum colours and equally the primary colour.



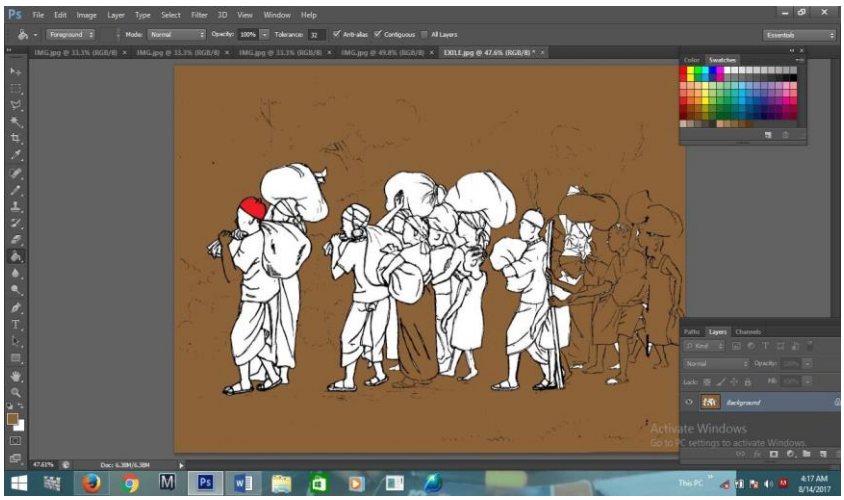
Fig 4: Exile, scanned sketch of one scene by the researcher

Stage 6, Correcting and remedying the broken lines

The correction of broken lines is very important when one wants to make preliminary fills on the drawing with colours. This is done to avoid the overflow of colours during colour filling.

When not properly corrected, colours for particular part will flow to those unwanted part if not filled correctly. Another great difficulty that will be experienced here when not properly corrected is that the use of "magic wand" will be very difficult in terms of selection of the desired painting part, it will create an over flow of the selection to the on desired part of the drawing. To do this correction the artist will click on the pencil tool in the tool box and right-clicked on the layout to change the point size of the brush. The essence of changing the brush size is to use one that is close to the pencil size.

Plate 1: The colour of the soil practically flew into the sky area and into people's apparels as a



result of not defining the lines of the sketches.Researcher2021.

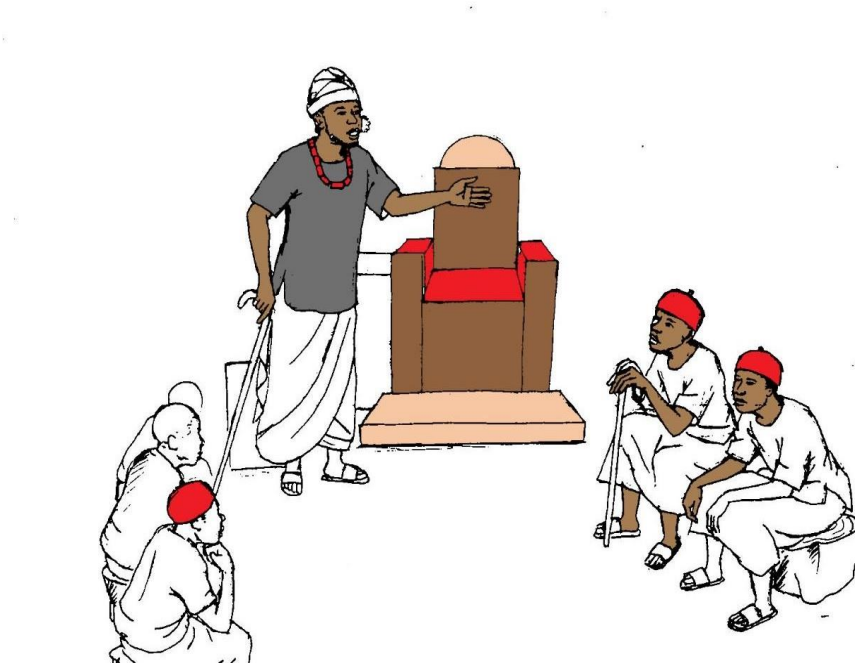
Draw and paint technique involves the following procedures: sketch, pen outline, erasure of outline, scan, adjustment of tone, joining of broken lines in the drawing, filling of flat colours (base colours), first rendering (midtone or shade), second rendering (midtone) and highlight rendering.

Stage 7, Filling of colours

This stage involves filling of flat colours. They are also known as base colours. One major important thing after correcting the lines is to duplicate a copy of the drawing on the layer panel box.

Here, the most pertinent tool on the tool box is the “paint bucket tool”. Occasionally, the “gradient tool is used” to suggest tonality over a large space such as sky or foreground, which will suggest aerial perspective. Because the setting of Omenuko is the colonial era, subtle and dull colours such as black, brown, gray, green are predominant colours on the pages with the exception of the sky.

Plate 2: filling of colours in progress. Researcher 2021.



Stage 8, Rendering

This step involves making the shades to suggest chiaroscuro effect. Chiaroscuro is an Italian word for light and dark with Chiaroscuro, artists employ values-lights and darks to record contrasts of light and shadow in the national world (Getlein, 2008:92), without which the project would appear flat and uninteresting. The important tools here are ‘brush tools and magic ‘wand tool’. While the brush is used in actual rendering of the surface, magic ward tool is used in the selection of certain parts of the illustration this will prevent colour to flow to other parts while working in the selected part. For instance, in shading the face the wand tool is used to select the face only, leaving the shirt region free.

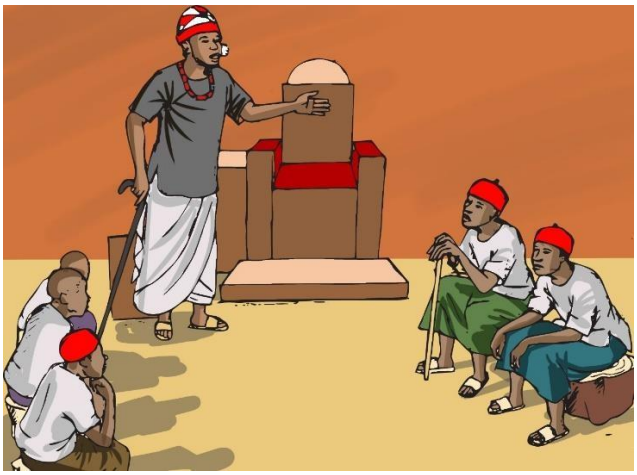


Plate 3: filling of colours in progress. Researcher 2021

Step 9, Highlight shading

Step seven also involves highlight rendering with the rendering of shades on the flat colour, there appeared shade and mid-tone. The third phase of rendering is the highlight: Here magic ward tool is used to pick all the mid-tone areas, then “feather properties is applied”. Feather property allows for smothering of the edges of the selections before applying colours. This help to create a three dimensional effect on the painted object. After the researcher must have finished with the application of the desired colours, the work is saved on JPEG, Joint Photographic Expect Group.



Plate 4: Highlight rendering in progress. Researcher 2021.

Preferable colour for highlight rendering is white, reduced of 20-30% specifically. The reason is because white is a neutral colour and is the highest point of hue on the colour value chart.

Conclusion

The work really opened up a lot of things, after the study it really exposed the decline in Igbo reading and speaking among the old and new generation of Igbo tribe. In view of the setbacks, it was glaring on the need for the reviving and rekindling of Igbo language to the benefit of the culture and the social setting of the Igbo people. The researcher saw the need for urgent attention to avoid total extinction and loss of cultural identity and decided to apply the use of Photoshop Cs6 digital technique in achieving a digital based illustration which is high in terms of aesthetic value strong in capturing attention and retaining interest. The researcher thinks about the future and the need to align with the modern trend in the world of visual communication design. Design has always played an important role around the society and individual as it affects cultural identity, social structures, economies, cultural development and environment**.**

Recommendations

The study therefore recommends the following:

1. Authors should be urged to use professional artists in illustrating their books
2. Curriculum planners should ensure that books recommended to pupils/students must be properly illustrated
3. Artists' should be trained to fit in with the modern trends of illustrations and there should be a synergy between the artists or illustrators, educators and the government to see to the actualisation of the recommendations.
4. Government, school authorities and philanthropists should provide enough computers to enable effective teaching of digital illustrations in secondary and tertiary institutions

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